



**An Archaeological Survey of the 6115 Fox Creek Tract,
Northeast San Antonio, Texas**

By

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Abstract

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants of San Antonio conducted an archaeological survey on the 21.25-acre Fox Creek tract adjacent to Stahl Road in north San Antonio, Texas in September 2012 for Frost GeoSciences. The upland property consists of a prominent topographic feature occupied by a 20th century house and several outbuildings, none of which merit historic designation. The ground surface of property is littered with Uvalde gravels. Evidence of minor prehistoric exploitation of these gravels was observed in the form of an occasional tested cobble, core, or flake. No concentrated prehistoric activity area that would merit the designation of an archaeological site was in evidence. No further archaeological work is recommended.

Introduction

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants (AAC) conducted a Phase I archaeological survey of the 21.25 acre 6115 Fox Creek tract in northeast San Antonio, Texas for Frost GeoSciences. The authors to insure that no archaeological or historical resources eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places are damaged or destroyed due to future development carried out the survey and assessment work. This Phase I investigation is designed to detect and record any archaeological or historical component that may be present in the project area.

The Fox Creek tract is located on a prominent topographic feature in north San Antonio adjacent to Comanche Lookout Park (Figs. 1 and 2). It is bordered on the north by Stahl Road and on the west in part by Fox Creek Elementary school property. Residential neighborhoods border the remainder of the tract. Comanche Lookout Park is the highest hill in this part of San Antonio and is a noted landmark for the area. The survey tract is the next highest hill in this area of San Antonio.

Background

Geology and Soils

The tract on Fox Creek road sits on the Edwards limestone of ca. 100 million years ago (Arnow 1959:Plate 2)(Fig. 3). Atop the adjacent Comanche Lookout hill, Pecan Gap Chalk has been identified (Nickels 1998:3), part of the Taylor Marl of roughly 80 million years before present.

Soils on the tract are of three types (Fig. 4), according to Taylor et al. (1991). One of the two dominate soils, Austin silty clay (AuB; 1-3% slopes) is found in the north/northwest area (towards Stahl Road), on low broad ridge tops. Adjacent to the south is the Brackett- Austin complex (BsC)_ of soils, it being the other dominant soil type found here. The soils are found on knolls and ridges on areas of 1-5% slope. These are light colored clays that have developed over chalk. Additional BsC soils are in the northwest corner adjacent to Stahl Road.

The southwest corner of the property has black dark clays with small pebbles and gravels. This is the Houston Black clay (HuB), occurring on 1-3% slopes of benches and ridge tops.

Regional Culture History

More than 2250 archaeological sites have been formally recorded in Bexar County (Texas Archeological Site Atlas, Texas Historical Commission). Based on studies at a number of these sites, the broad outline of the archaeology of northern Bexar County can be outlined. Major time periods and site types are briefly noted here.

The **Paleoindian** period, 9,200-6,800 B.C., has distinctive chipped stone spear points used in hunting mammoth and other late Ice Age mammals early in the period. Other spear types appear with a shift to bison, deer and other game after the Ice Age ended around 8000 B.C. (Hester 1986). Known site types in northern Bexar County are *campsites* with flint-chipping debris from stone-tool making and repair. One site of Clovis age (9,200 B.C.) was excavated near FM1604 and Leon Creek (Collins et al.2003).

Sites of the following **Archaic** period are common in northern Bexar County. These peoples were hunters and gatherers as in the earlier Paleoindian period, but lived in an environment very similar to those of modern times. Projectile points used to tip spears (often erroneously called “arrowheads”) change in shape through time, from 6,800 B.C.

to 500 A.D. (Turner et al. 2011). Archaeologists use these forms to recognize more specific time frames within the Archaic (e.g., Early, Middle and Late Archaic). In northern Bexar County, the most distinctive Archaic site is the *burned rock midden*. These large accumulations of fire-cracked limestone result from the use of earth-oven cooking starting around 3,000 B.C. (Black et al. 1997; Nickel et al. 2000). Such features were part of *larger campsites*, with large amounts of flint debris from tool making; sometimes, animal bone (dietary remains) and charcoal that can be used for radiocarbon dating. Other Archaic site types include *lithic procurement* areas (where flint cobbles eroded out of the Edwards limestone and were processed), *lithic scatters* (lightly-used areas probably representing short-term hunting and gathering activities), and rarely, *sinkhole burials* (Archaic peoples often disposed of their dead by placing them in sinkholes and caverns; Bement 1994).

By 700 A.D., there began to be some changes in the long hunter-gatherer lifeway. The **Late Prehistoric** is first seen with the introduction of the bow and arrow. The stone arrow points are very small (mistakenly called “bird points”), but could be used in hunting game of any size. By 1300 A.D., the economy emphasized buffalo hunting. Most sites of this era include *campsites*, often in areas previously used by Archaic peoples, *lithic scatters* of this age; and the *lithic procurement areas* of earlier times continued to be used.

During the **Historic** period, the best-known archaeological remains are *ranch and farmhouses of cut stone*, dating from the 1840s through the 1880s. Stacked- stone fences also occur (Shafer and Hester 2007). Such sites, including those without surviving structures, are recognized from 19th century pottery fragments, artifacts of glass and metal, etc. Later Historic houses and farmsteads, through the early 1900s, are also found.

Nearby Sites

The only notable archaeological field work in this area has involved the distinctive hill (1,340 feet a.s.l.) known as “Comanche Lookout.” A detailed review of the history of

the locale, as well as notes about artifact collecting over the years, is found in Nickels (1998). Nickels directed an archaeological survey of 96 acres set aside by the City of San Antonio as "Comanche Lookout Park." The staff of the Center for Archaeological Research, The University of Texas at San Antonio conducted the 1997 survey.

As a result of the survey, three archaeological sites were discovered and recorded. One of these, 41BX1257, is a large lithic procurement area ("quarry") found at the base of the hill. It had been noted five years earlier by a survey team from the Southern Texas Archaeological Association. However, Nickels (1998:18) found that the site area also included an area of historic disturbance (construction of a building, a water well, and vehicular traffic) beginning around 1928. Two time diagnostic artifacts were collected from the prehistoric area. These include a dart point fragment which Nickels (1998:14) classified as Pedernales, although the authors of this report feel it is better placed in the Uvalde type. This is Early Archaic in age, roughly 5000-7000 years ago.

The other diagnostic is a Guadalupe tool (Nickel 1998:15), a relatively crude bifacial artifact with a distinctive "bit." These are well known from Bexar and surrounding counties and would likely be associated with the Uvalde point in terms of age.

The other two sites reported from the 1997 survey were both lithic scatters of unknown antiquity. Both 41BX1257 and BX1258 are small to medium scatters, with a few flakes and cores. At 41BX1258, a polyhedral blade core and two blades that came from the core ("refits") were found. It is likely a Late Prehistoric blade core of the Toyah Phase (A.D. 1300-1700). However, it is of further interest because distinctive blade cores of the Clovis complex (ca. 13,000-11,000 years age) have been surface-collected from the site (Kelly 1992; Collins and Headrick 1992)

Research Design

The research design called for a pedestrian survey for the entire tract. Backhoe testing will not be necessary due to the potential shallow soil depth. A no artifact collection

policy will be followed. Any archeological material encountered will be located on the project map. Following the fieldwork, the information recovered from the pedestrian survey will be compiled and evaluated. A formal report will be prepared for Frost GeoSciences and the City of San Antonio Office of Historic Preservation.

Survey Results

A mid-twentieth century ranch-style house occupies the crest of the hill (Fig. 5). An additional house and several out buildings are near the main house. None of the structures is considered eligible for historic designation. The remainder of the property is mostly wooded with juniper, oak, and underbrush (Figs 6 and 7)). Part of the property had previously been in cultivation based on the soils map shown in Figure 4. This previously cultivated area has been reclaimed by juniper and underbrush.

Numerous trails have been created that wind throughout the wooded areas, and these trails provided access and transects for the survey party (Fig. 7 bottom). A 100% survey was not possible due to the density of the vegetation in some areas, but random surface exposures throughout the property and transects created by the numerous nature trails coverage was sufficient to determine if cultural resources were present and adequately assess these resources.

The survey party noted that the hill slopes were littered with Uvalde Gravels that contained dense concentrations of high-quality chert (Fig. 8). Prehistoric exploitation of these chert resources was evidence in the occasional presence of primary (cortex and secondary cortex) flakes and cores. The main areas where quarried chert was noted is in a zone below the crest, particularly on the north and east sides of the crest. None of these resources were sufficiently concentrated, however, to warrant archaeological site designation. The observed artifacts follow a very common pattern that these researchers have noted for the hills and slopes south and east of the Balcones Escarpment where cobbles of chert are readily available. Prehistory quarry activity is highly predictable in

these locations, and varies from densely concentrated chert quarries to isolated flakes and cores among the unworked chert cobbles.

Several cores (Figs. 8 bottom; 9) and flakes were observed during the survey and these are recorded as isolated finds. Only one diagnostic artifact was noted (Fig. 10). This was a unifacially sharpened sequent flake, a type of tool used as a knife (Shafer, 2012; Turner et al., 2011: 249, 250). These unique artifacts are diagnostic of Early Archaic assemblages (8500-5000 years ago; Turner et al. 2011:249). They are created by a technology whereby the core is pre-shaped for the removal of a specific kind of flake. The flake was removed in a sequence with a positive bulb of percussion on the ventral face and a negative bulb on the dorsal face. The intended result of this particular technology was to obtain an oval flake with one straight or slightly convex featheredge that served as the knife blade.

blade.

Summary and Recommendations

A pedestrian survey of the Fox Creek tract yielded evidence of minor prehistoric lithic procurement (quarry) activity in the surface scatter of Uvalde Gravels around the north and east slopes of the prominence, but no concentrated cultural resource sufficient to define an archaeological site. Only one diagnostic artifact, a sequent flake tool generally dated to the Early Archaic Period (ca. 8500-5000 years ago) was observed as an isolated find. No further archaeological work is recommended.

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Figures

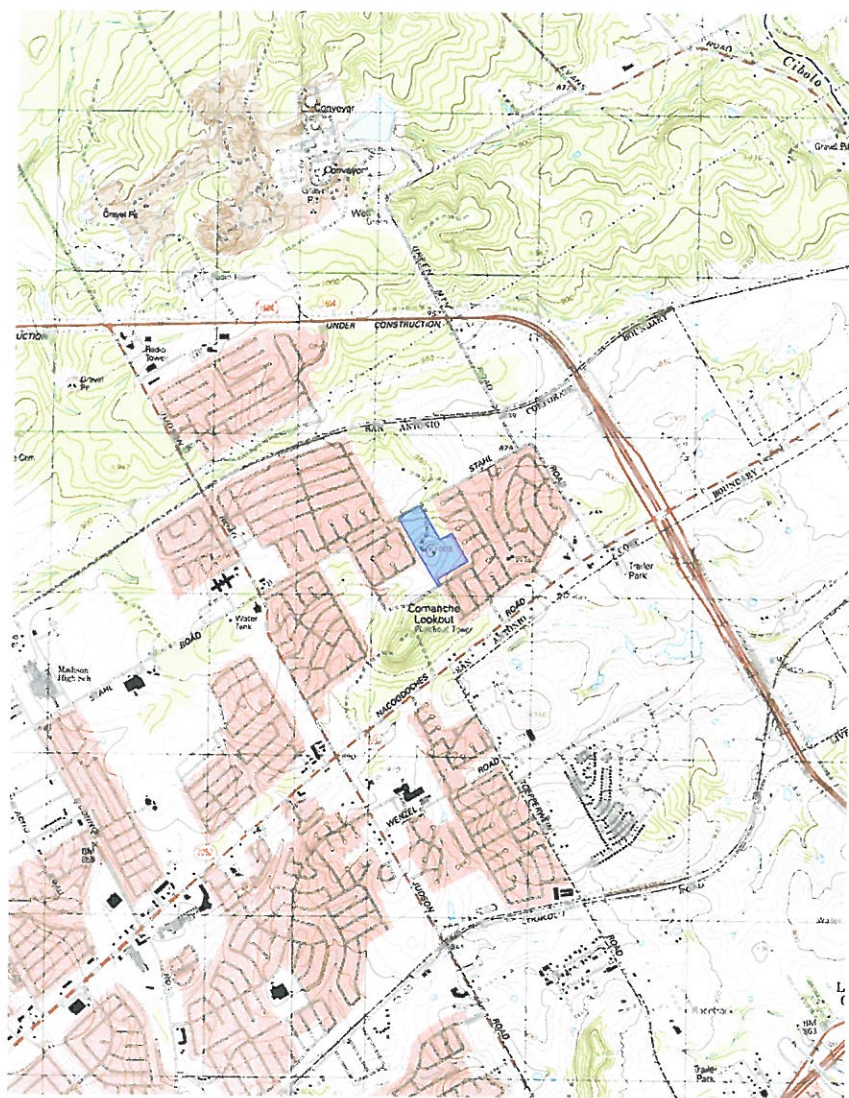


Figure 1. Topographic map showing the location of the Fox Creek tract. Image provided by Frost GeoSciences.



Figure 2. Aerial view of the Fox Creek tract. Image provided by Frost GeoSciences.



Figure 3. Geology map of the Fox Creek tract showing the Lower Taylor Group as the dominant underlying geological formation. Image provided by Frost GeoSciences.

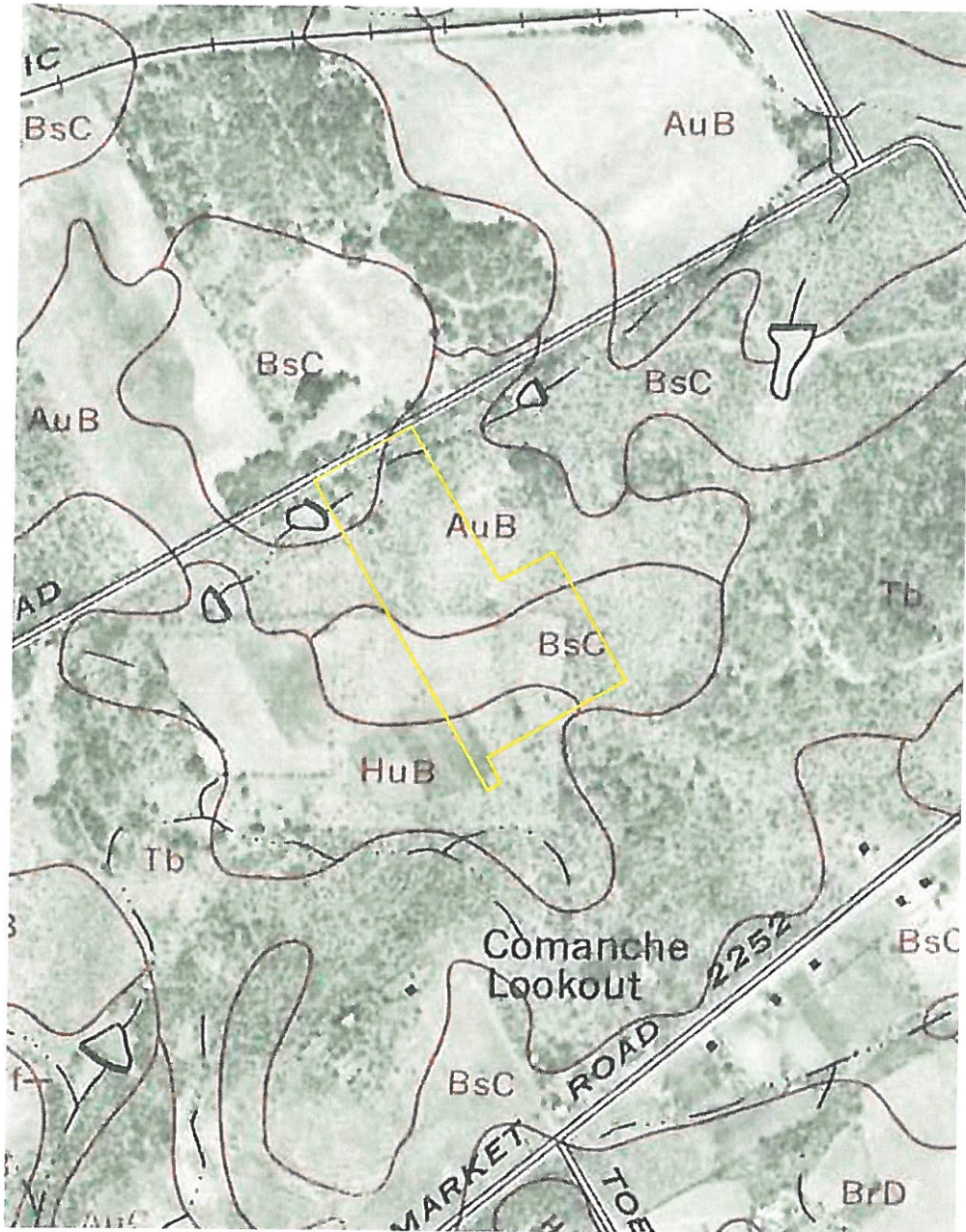


Figure 4. Soils map of the Fox Creek tract showing the three soil types that occur in the area. Image provided by Frost GeoSciences.



Figure 5. Mid-twentieth century ranch-style house located on the crest of the hill at the Fox Creek tract.



Figure 6. View of the vegetation coverage in previously cultivated part of the Fox Creek tract.



Figure 7. Two views of the landscape at the Fox Creek tract showing open areas and nature trails.



Figure 8. Top: View of Uvalde Gravels at the Fox Creek tract. Bottom: Discarded chert core.



Figure 9. Chert cores observed at the Fox Creek tract.



Figure 10. Views of the sequent flake tool observed on the Fox Creek tract.